

VZCZCXRO0854
RR RUEHRN RUEHROV
DE RUEHKM #0081/01 0541235
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 231234Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY KAMPALA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0260
INFO IGAD COLLECTIVE
RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KAMPALA 000081

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/23

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [UG](#)

SUBJECT: UGANDA: PRESIDENTIAL ASPIRANT OLARA OTUNNU'S STRATEGY FOR 2011

REF: 09 KAMPALA 1411; 10 KAMPALA 69; 10 KAMPALA 73

CLASSIFIED BY: Aaron Sampson, Pol/Econ Chief; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) Summary: On February 16, presidential hopeful and former UN Under Secretary Olara Otunnu characterized his December 21 auto accident with the Presidential Guard Brigade as an assassination attempt, and said the U.S. congressional reporting requirement for Uganda's election is a core component of his strategy to mobilize voters against President Museveni in 2011. Otunnu, speaking on the margins of a disorganized by-election in the eastern town of Mbale in which his party captured only 1% of the vote (septel), said the 2011 election presents a final window of opportunity for Uganda, that there is "no way" the current Electoral Commission will preside over the 2011 elections, and that the U.S. should use its response to Uganda's draft anti-homosexuality bill as a blueprint for pressuring Museveni to respect democratic norms. End Summary.

Otunnu: AmCit Foiled Assassination Attempt

12. (C) Otunnu said his December 21 accident with a Presidential Guard Brigade (PGB) convoy (ref. A) was "a targeted operation, meant to assassinate," and attributed his survival to the unexpected presence of an American film maker in his car. Otunnu alleged that the soldiers who surrounded him with guns drawn after forcing his car from the road would have fired had the American not been present. Otunnu dismissed police claims that an investigation into the incident is ongoing, stating that police lack the authority to investigate the PGB, and that the Ugandan government will not pursue the matter. Otunnu claimed unnamed advisors to President Museveni have admitted that the accident was planned to intimidate or harm Otunnu in retaliation for his ability to mobilize international opinion against Museveni. Other Embassy sources have claimed the incident was indeed harassment but nobody else thinks it was an attempt to kill Otunnu.

Otunnu's 2011 Campaign Playbook

13. (C) Describing himself as an "American carpetbagger" more at home in the U.S. than Uganda, Otunnu said he lobbied Washington contacts to include a reporting requirement on the 2011 elections

in the 2010 Foreign Appropriations Act (ref. B), and that the congressional directive is a core component of his electoral strategy. He said his campaign theme is "unity", and that the reporting requirement sends a message of unity and hope to Ugandans by confirming that the U.S. supports free and fair democratic processes and is not in "cahoots" with Museveni. Otunnu claimed crowds in rural Uganda respond with shock and applause when he relates U.S. interest in Ugandan democracy, and that his stump speech exhorts voters to join with the U.S. and international donors to stand up for democracy. Referencing President Obama's Accra speech, Otunnu said change in Uganda depends on two factors: international support for free and fair elections, and everyday Ugandans' willingness to take control of their own future.

14. (C) Otunnu said the congressional directive is particularly bad news for Museveni because it inspires Ugandan voters to speak out against the President, and undermines Museveni's image as a leader with broad international support. Otunnu said Museveni cultivates this image as a means of tamping down domestic dissent, and that Museveni is extremely concerned about the directive, but still trying to work out whether the U.S. is serious about the 2011 electoral process. Echoing recent statements by several civil society leaders (ref. C), Otunnu said the international community's aggressive response to the anti-homosexuality bill provides a blueprint for pressuring Museveni to abide by democratic norms, and that if the U.S. shows it is serious about free and fair elections,

KAMPALA 00000081 002 OF 002

then Museveni will fall in line.

The Long-shot

15. (C) Otunnu has not yet officially announced his candidacy for the 2011 presidential election. He said he intended to make an announcement during the February 16 parliamentary by-election in Mbale, but scrapped the idea at the last moment to avoid pre-empting the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) party's internal nomination process. The UPC is fractured, with nine candidates vying for the party's presidential nomination, including Jimmy Akena, the son of former UPC leader and Ugandan President Milton Obote. These fissures have weakened the party, and even with Otunnu's presence on by-election day in Mbale, the UPC managed to capture only 1% of the vote. Otunnu expressed confidence that he will win the UPC's presidential nomination, provided the UPC can pull itself together long enough to resolve a court battle between rival factions and scrounge money needed to hold a party delegates conference.

Opposition Coalition Calculations

16. (C) Otunnu said he strongly supports the opposition Inter-Party Cooperation (IPC) coalition's desire for a single opposition candidate, and that defeating Museveni is more important than internal rivalries over who wins the IPC's endorsement. NOTE: The frontrunner for the IPC's nomination is Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) president Kizza Besigye. END NOTE. Ottunu said "there is no way" the current Electoral Commission will preside over the 2011 elections, and that every day the "Commission puts another nail in

its coffin." He said the entire structure of the Commission is compromised, and a "clean sweep" of the entire Commission is required. He declined to speculate on what the IPC will do if the Commission remains unchanged, saying only that the current Commission is unacceptable and that the IPC is reviewing potential responses.

17. (C) Asked for his predictions for 2011, Otunnu said Museveni has always assumed that Ugandans will not challenge him, but that he may be in for a surprise. Otunnu said there are deep and dangerous levels of bitterness in Uganda, both at the grassroots and political levels, directed at the political/military class over which Museveni presides and also, to a lesser extent, at ethnic westerners who many perceive as the main beneficiaries of the Museveni regime. "This is the last window this country has to prevent something really nasty in 2011," said Otunnu. "If 2011 is aborted in terms of free and fair elections, God help us."

Comment: An International Candidate

18. (C) After 24 years of exile abroad, Otunnu has little support in Uganda. His power as an opposition figure is derived not from internal popularity but from his international network. By encouraging the U.S. and other donors to take a critical view of Uganda's electoral processes, Otunnu has delivered one half of his equation for unseating Museveni in 2011. The other component - convincing Ugandan voters to oppose Museveni en masse on election day - will likely fall to an opposition candidate with a serious domestic following, such as the FDC's Kizza Besigye.
LANIER